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UNCLAS MANILA 005877

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STATE FOR EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, INR/EAP, INR/B

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER DEFENSE SECRETARY RELEASED AFTER BEING
CHARGED WITH INCITING SEDITION

REF: A. MANILA 5844

[1](#)B. MANILA 1988

[1](#)1. (U) This message is Sensitive But Unclassified -- Please handle accordingly.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary: Former defense secretary Fortunado Abat and three members of his self-proclaimed "Revolutionary Transition Government" were released on December 16 -- a day after police detained them for questioning. All four men were charged with "inciting sedition." The 80-year old Abat's effort to replace the Arroyo government appears to have been a blip on the radar screen that has only served to draw loud guffaws. End Summary.

[1](#)3. (U) The Philippine National Police (PNP) released former defense secretary General Fortunado Abat late December 16 after detaining him the day before for "inciting sedition." Plainclothes officers from the PNP's Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) had detained Abat on December 15 two days after he declared himself "President" of a "Revolutionary Transition Government" during a press event at a Manila social club (ref A). Former National Labor Relations Commission Chairman Roy Senares, former budget secretary Salvador Enriquez, and attorney Charlie Serapio --

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all members of Abat's self-proclaimed "government" -- were taken into custody at the same time and were released along with Abat. Like him, they were also charged with the inciting sedition charge. All of the accused were released after posting bail of 12,000 pesos (USD 225). If convicted, they face between six and twelve years imprisonment.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Reaction to Abat's release has been muted. Despite the fact that Abat is believed to maintain friends in the military (he was once commander of the army in addition to being defense secretary), there has been little reaction within the ranks of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to his detention. Malacanang, for its part, sought to downplay the matter. Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye told the press on December 17, "As far as Malacanang is concerned, this issue is over. This is now a police and judicial matter and what the police did was within the bounds of the law. We would prefer to talk about more productive endeavors." Some members of Congress criticized Malacanang for coming down too hard on Abat, asserting that Abat's halting effort need not have been dignified with a police response.

[1](#)5. (U) Abat's lawyer vowed to file charges against the PNP and the Philippine Department of Justice for illegal arrest and detention, as well as preventing legal assembly, grave coercion, theft, and other crimes. He contends the detention was illegal because the PNP had not obtained a warrant before detaining Abat and his supporters. (Note: When asked at a December 15 press conference about this, PNP Spokesman Chief Superintendent Leopoldo Bataoil responded that the police had made a "citizen's arrest," which required no warrant. End Note.)

[1](#)6. (SBU) Comment: The 80-year old Abat's effort to replace the Arroyo government appears to have been a blip on the radar screen that has only served to draw loud guffaws. In making his announcement, Abat was clearly trying to agitate the military, but, as noted, there was no discernible resonance from that quarter to his effort (save for that of his son, a military officer who has been relieved from a field command and investigated for apparently supporting his father). Arroyo may be suffering from precipitously low poll numbers, but Filipinos at large seem more focused on Christmas than politics at this point.

JONES